

Assessment Brief

ACT ANNUAL ANALYSIS REPORT

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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the results of the ACT test for the Virginia Beach City Public Schools (VBCPS) graduating class of 2008. National and state ACT data and results from the VBCPS graduating classes of 2004 through 2007 are provided for comparative purposes. A total of 577 students from the Virginia Beach class of 2008 took the ACT. The average scores of the 2008 VBCPS graduates in all four subject areas was higher than the average score for 2007 graduates, and higher than the average scores of 2008 graduates at the national level. The Virginia Beach average composite score on the ACT was slightly lower than the average composite score for all 2008 Virginia graduates. Over half of the VBCPS students who graduated in 2008 met or surpassed the ACT College Readiness Benchmark Scores in three subjects, and the percentages of VBCPS students meeting or exceeding benchmark scores on each of the four subject tests were higher than the percentages for 2007 graduates and the 2008 national percentages.

BACKGROUND

The American College Testing Program, Inc. was founded in 1959 as a not-for-profit organization whose primary purpose was to administer tests to high school students aspiring to attend college. In 1996, the organization changed its name to ACT, Inc. The ACT test is an achievement exam comprised of four curriculum-based, multiple-choice tests in the subject areas of English, mathematics, reading, and science. There is also an optional writing test that measures students' skill in planning and writing a short essay. According to ACT, Inc., "The ACT test assesses high school students' general educational development and their ability to complete college-level work." Students receive a score on a scale of 1 to 36 in each subject along with a composite score, which is the average of the four core subject test scores. On the optional writing test, students are given a combined English/writing score on a scale of 1 to 36 and a writing subscore on a scale of 2 to 12.

Although the SAT is still the dominant college-admissions test in Virginia, the number of students who took the ACT across the state and in Virginia Beach continues to increase. Altogether, 577 students from the 2008 graduating classes of all 12 Virginia Beach high schools (including Open Campus) took the four curriculum-based ACT tests; 322 of these students chose

to take the writing test. In an August 2007 news release, ACT, Inc. reported “The overwhelming majority (90 percent) of all four-year colleges and universities in the U.S. report using ACT scores in their admission decision-making process.” In addition, thousands of postsecondary institutions—including scholarship agencies, state educational systems, individual public and private universities, junior and community colleges, and technical schools—require or recommend that applicants submit results from the ACT.

ACT COMPOSITE SCORES AND TEST RESULTS BY SUBJECT

Table 1 below contains a summary of ACT results for five Virginia Beach graduating classes from 2004 to 2008, along with data for students in the class of 2008 who took the ACT test in Virginia and across the nation. Average scores are reported for students who graduated from high school in the specified year and took the ACT during their sophomore, junior, or senior year in school. The Virginia Beach average composite score of 21.6 for 2008 graduates was higher than the score of 21.0 for 2007 graduates, and average scores for 2008 Virginia Beach graduates in all four subject areas showed an increase from the scores of the previous year’s graduating class. The Virginia Beach composite scores and average scores in each subject area were also higher than the corresponding scores at the national level. The VBCPS composite score was slightly lower than the 21.8 average of 2008 graduates at the state level, as were the average English and reading scores of Virginia Beach graduates when compared with students across the state. However, the Virginia Beach math and science scores were somewhat higher than those scores at the state level.

Table 1
Five-Year Trends – Virginia Beach Average ACT Scores

Graduation Year	Number of Test Takers	English	Math	Reading	Science	Composite
2004	412	20.1	20.4	20.7	20.5	20.5
2005	448	20.7	20.8	21.3	21.2	21.1
2006	453	20.0	21.0	20.8	20.6	20.8
2007	539	20.3	21.1	20.9	21.0	21.0
2008	577	20.9	21.9	21.7	21.5	21.6
Virginia – 2008	16,896	21.5	21.8	22.2	21.3	21.8
Nation – 2008	1,421,941	20.6	21.0	21.4	20.8	21.1

Source: ACT, Inc.

ACT SCORES BY RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP

The average ACT composite scores for VBCPS graduates over the past five years were disaggregated by racial/ethnic group and included in Table 2 on the following page. Additionally, the scores for 2008 graduates in Virginia and across the nation by racial/ethnic group are listed in the table. Due to the low number of Asian/Pacific Islanders and Hispanic graduates taking the ACT in Virginia Beach, a greater fluctuation in average ACT scores from year to year can be seen for these two groups of students. The 2008 scores for all four ethnic groups in Virginia Beach were higher than the average scores of the same groups in the

graduating class from the previous year. The scores of African-American and Caucasian/White VBCPS graduates exceeded the scores of their counterparts at both the state and national levels in 2008, while the average score of the Virginia Beach Asian/Pacific Islander group was lower than the Asian/Pacific Islander scores in Virginia and across the nation. Although Hispanic graduates from the VBCPS class of 2008 scored marginally lower on the ACT than Hispanic graduates in Virginia, the average score for Virginia Beach Hispanic students was considerably higher than the national average for the same group.

Table 2
Five-Year Trends – Virginia Beach Average ACT Composite Scores by Race/Ethnicity¹

Group	2004		2005		2006		2007		2008		2008	2008
	N	Score	N	Score	N	Score	N	Score	N	Score	Virginia	Nation
African American	120	17.6	98	18.0	121	17.7	109	17.5	144	18.2	17.5	16.9
Asian/Pacific Islander	24	21.0	28	21.8	23	23.5	22	21.2	46	21.8	23.6	22.9
Caucasian/White	213	21.9	249	22.5	223	21.9	292	22.3	313	23.1	22.9	22.1
Hispanic	16	22.1	16	18.5	9	22.3	12	20.0	22	20.9	21.0	18.7
All ACT Test Takers	412	20.5	448	21.1	453	20.8	539	21.0	577	21.6	21.8	21.1

Source: ACT, Inc.

ACT COLLEGE READINESS BENCHMARK SCORES

Also reported by ACT, Inc. are College Readiness Benchmark Scores and the percentage of graduates meeting or exceeding those benchmarks. According to ACT, “a benchmark score is the minimum score needed on an ACT subject-area test to indicate a 50 percent chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75 percent chance of obtaining a C or higher in the corresponding credit-bearing college courses.” The benchmark scores were “empirically derived based on the actual performance of students in college.” As shown in Table 3 on the next page, the majority of 2008 Virginia Beach graduates who took the ACT met or surpassed the English, math, and reading benchmark scores (71%, 51%, and 55%, respectively), while less than half (32%) met or surpassed the benchmark score in science. This was an improvement over the percentages of last year’s VBCPS graduates meeting or exceeding the benchmark scores on all four tests, as well as higher percentages than the 2008 national levels for each test. One quarter of 2008 Virginia Beach graduates (25%) met or surpassed the benchmarks on all four tests, which was slightly lower than for Virginia graduates (26%), but higher than the nation’s 2008 graduates (22%) who took the ACT.

¹ Only racial/ethnic groups with more than ten test takers in at least one of the five years are included in the table. Ethnicity is self-reported on the ACT test. Of the 2008 graduates who took the ACT test, 22.3 percent in Virginia Beach, 23.0 percent in Virginia, and 21.7 percent in the nation chose not to provide their ethnicity or selected “other” as their racial/ethnic group.

Table 3
Five-Year Trends – Percent of Virginia Beach Students Meeting or Exceeding
ACT College Readiness Benchmark Scores

Graduation Year	Number of Test Takers	English (Benchmark Score=18)	Math (Benchmark Score=22)	Reading (Benchmark Score=21)	Science (Benchmark Score=24)	Meeting All Four Benchmarks
2004	412	65%	37%	47%	23%	18%
2005	448	71%	43%	54%	28%	23%
2006	453	66%	43%	50%	26%	22%
2007	539	68%	47%	51%	30%	24%
2008	577	71%	51%	55%	32%	25%
Virginia – 2008						
Virginia – 2008	16,896	74%	50%	58%	32%	26%
Nation – 2008						
Nation – 2008	1,421,941	68%	43%	53%	28%	22%

Source: ACT, Inc.

ACT OPTIONAL WRITING TEST SCORES

A total of 322 students from the VBCPS graduating class of 2008 opted to take the ACT writing test. Two scores are reported on the optional writing test: an essay subscore and a combined English/writing score. The essay subscore is on a scale ranging from 2 to 12, and the English/writing score is on a scale of 1 to 36. The average essay subscore for the 2008 Virginia Beach graduating class was 7.4, which was slightly above the national average subscore of 7.3 and slightly below the Virginia average of 7.5. The average combined English/writing score of 21.9 for 2008 Virginia Beach graduates was also higher than the national English/writing average of 20.9, but just below the state average of 22.0. These scores are included in Table 4 below.

Table 4
ACT Optional Writing Test Results – 2008

Level	Number of Test Takers	Essay Subscore	English/Writing
Virginia Beach City Public Schools	322	7.4	21.9
Virginia	10,077	7.5	22.0
Nation	770,529	7.3	20.9

Source: ACT, Inc.